



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

or institutional organization. All these have been put in practice in Massachusetts; the first and third by the instrumentality of the Board of Charities, and with gratifying success, especially in what has been done for the children of the poor by means of the State Primary School and the Visiting Agency. Moreover, special efforts have been made to induce the kindred of the poor to provide for them, and to have those needing public relief cared for by that community to which they properly belong; and a vigilant supervision has been exercised, so far as the power of the board extended, over the expenditure of money and the methods of relief and of discipline. That the plague of pauperism has never spread widely in America is due mainly to our institutions and the opportunity which is offered to the poor man; that it has been controlled and diminished where a dense population and the varied competitions of industry had given it a foothold must be ascribed, in part at least, to the measures adopted in Massachusetts since 1863, which have been indicated rather than described in this paper.

F. B. SANBORN.

---

## ART. II. — AMERICAN CRITICISM; ITS DIFFICULTIES AND PROSPECTS.

MANY persons have found Crabb Robinson's Diary a heavy book to read through; and he has been suspected of owing the reputation which he enjoyed among his contemporaries to some lucky accidents, such as his acquaintance with more distinguished characters, or his being one of the first Englishmen who thought it worth while to make a study of German literature. But we can gather indirectly from his pages that he was a man of rare conversational power and occasionally epigrammatic speech, and he certainly uttered one sentence which deserves a place among the classic *mots* of literary history. It was his observation to a friend suspected of being hypercritical: *If all the world were like you, there would be no work done. But if there were no one in the world like you, there would be no work done well.*

Volumes, nay, libraries, might be written without improving on this definition of the critical function. It is at once the explanation and vindication of the critic. It demonstrates the irrelevance of the popular slurs on criticism, such as that which, often uttered before in a better way by stronger men,\* recently asserted for itself a pseudo-originality in Disraeli's last bundle of paradoxes, namely, that the critics of any department are those who have failed in it; or the opposite suggestion of Thackeray, that critics are generally young or at least untried men, who have never experienced the difficulty of executing a conception. The vulgar form in which these and similar strictures usually appear is the assertion that the critic could not produce a work superior to that which he condemns, — a retort about equal in point of logic to the proposition that no man has a right to find fault with a house or a dinner, unless he is prepared to build or cook a better offhand.

In fact, although we have some fortunate examples, even in our own country, to prove that the parts of producer and critic are not incompatible, the leading qualities which go to make up each are so far from being identical or even analogous, that for many purposes it is safe to consider them antagonistic, and instead of inferring, for instance, that a leading producer in any branch of art or literature will naturally be an excellent critic in it, our *a priori* conclusion ought rather to be the very reverse. How and why this is we shall endeavor to show further on; this much is said for the present, in order to guard the reader against the assumption that a low standard of American criticism cannot exist in conjunction with individual instances of brilliant literary success, or that such instances disprove it.

That the current standard of our criticism is low — lower than it should be, lower than it is elsewhere — may be unpleasant to say, but would be difficult to question. In saying it we have no desire to extol unduly the performances of European workers in this field, or to view their achievements with blind admiration. We readily admit that the best French critics are tainted with Parisian cockneyism, and that the overwhelming accuracy of some English authorities is occasionally

---

\* Notably by Swift and Balzac.

relieved by very extraordinary blunders in the literary history, not only of the Continent, but even of England. It may also be conceded that partisanship, unfairness, and bad *animus* are not altogether unknown among the best representatives of the critical world abroad. Still, to the candid and well-informed reader, the broad, general impression is irresistible, that the European's work is more workmanlike, inspired by more thorough knowledge, guided by a more cultivated taste, and proceeding under a higher sense of responsibility.

Now what are the particular causes of our deficiency in criticism, considered as a special branch of literature apart from creation or production?

Some are on the surface, others lie deeper. Among the former the first place may be assigned to our national good-nature. All the levelling and equalizing tendencies of the age have failed to make the individual *par sibi*, and the character of a great community must be fertile in contradictions. It certainly seems odd that a people who have acquired — we wish we could say undeservedly — the worst reputation in the world for manners, should be also remarkable for easiness of temper and patience under imposition of all sorts; but the fact, however hard to explain, is impossible to deny. And the quality is not so wholly and purely virtuous as some of us may be disposed to claim. Good-nature, whether in the individual or the class, is composed of at least two elements, — benevolence and moral indolence. The desire to be rid of a beggar's importunity, the unwillingness to take the trouble of finding out the truth or falsehood of his claim upon the charitable, are motives which exercise as potent an influence on the pocket of the average passer-by, as a veritable desire to relieve distress. The same lazy long-suffering which allows the American public to be bullied and discomforted in the travel which is part of its daily life, by hotel clerks, express clerks, railroad officials, and the whole tribe of jacks-in-office, has also made it and many of its literary representatives who knew better, culpably lenient to a multitude of literary pretenders. A habit of promiscuous praise long ago deprived praise of all real meaning and value. In one sense the practice may be called honest; it is not generally the result of downright bribery.

Purchased panegyric is not more common here than elsewhere, —indeed, is less common, though some of our reckless journalists have insinuated, if not openly asserted, the contrary. But in another sense it is dishonest, —as much so as giving a good character to a worthless servant.

The habit of good-natured approval may be, indeed has been, defended on the ground that, during our early absorption in material interests, any effort, however feeble, to show that there were other things worth living for besides building, buying, and selling, deserved encouragement and support. But while the positive mischief was done, the hypothetical good was not attained. The founders of our literature were lifted to fame and (so far as they enjoyed it) fortune, not by the indiscriminating eulogy of home reviewers, but by the more balanced approval of European critics. This fact was strictly in accordance with the precedents and canons of art, and there is little sense in trying to shirk or disguise it, as if it were a national humiliation. On the other hand, the habit continued long after the supposed necessity had ceased to exist, long after our literary stocks were flourishing with sufficient hardihood to need no artificial protection.

For some time the principal exception to this general rule of unintelligent good-nature was an exception almost worse than the rule itself. A marked acerbity of interlocal and intersectional criticism startled at intervals the indolent propriety (so far as literature was concerned) of the press. New York and Boston, not merely as two individual cities, but also to some extent in a representative capacity, the former being supposed to stand for all New England, and the latter for the Middle and even some of the Border Southern States, were pitted against each other by a petty local jealousy, which constantly imbittered their literary relations. Between the whole North and the whole South æsthetic disputes were intensified by the intrusion of the terrible political feud which was gradually growing towards its crisis. Some of the very best men of all sections were not free from the influence of these local antagonisms, and the rank and file were of course impregnated with it. At one time there really seemed a danger that a permanent class of literary skirmishers might be formed, whose pre-

tensions to critical merit would be founded on their abuse of whatever was produced in rival localities.

A third obstacle to the formation of a true and generally diffused critical spirit was the vague notion that American literature must have some purely American flavor about it, — something that differs from European literature, as our scenery does from European scenery; something new and grand and savage. There was just enough truth about this fancy to make it a perilous delusion. That we should not produce tame copies of Transatlantic mannerisms, that we should not, for instance (to take obvious and trivial illustrations), transplant the nightingale into American groves, or decorate the American millionaire with the manners and speech of the feudal aristocrat, — all this was good, sensible doctrine, worthy of Dr. Holland or of old Hesiod himself. But that we should disown all the established standards, not merely of our own language, but of its classical predecessors, was a dream the fulfilment of which would have required not merely the invention of a new tongue, but the construction of a fundamentally separate civilization. Equally misleading was the supposition that the grandeur of national objects must and ought to be a source of inspiration. In poetry, above all, it was contradicted by the plainest historical facts. The bards of Switzerland are yet to come, and some of the most charming English lyrics have been suggested by ordinary, we may even say by vulgar objects, — a bird or a barmaid. To make the desired experiment under proper conditions, it would be necessary, not to complete the civilization of our people, but to throw them back into barbarism; and were this impossibility possible, we should still have to consider that the natural scenery of Greece and Asia Minor supplied but a small part of Homer's inspiration, and that his perfection of the picturesque was a formal garden. Yet otherwise sensible men have talked as if Niagara and the prairies and the Rocky Mountains must of their own virtue supply the divine *afflatus*.

The idea of making size do duty for grandeur was nothing new. It had been tried by the Orientals ages ago. It had been tried by that "very German Milton," Klopstock. And doubtless there is a certain amount of grandeur, or, it might be

more accurate to say, appearance of grandeur, in great size and magnitude. We may make a sponge-cake big enough to impress the ordinary spectator with its quasi-majesty. A drunken revel assumes a sort of sublimity, if we can crowd toppers enough and liquor enough into it. But such contrivances are always more or less barbarous, and altogether at variance with the highest cultivation and refinement.\*

Fully as erroneous was the analogous assumption, that great national actions must call forth great poetry in their own day. The epic seems to be a very lost art, and the only serious attempt at one in the present century was founded on the more than semi-fabulous adventures of a scarcely less than mythical British king. We can hardly possess our souls in patience to wait for *the American epic*.†

It may not be immediately evident to all readers how this craving for a peculiarly "American" literature could influence American criticism unfavorably. But the effort was in no degree less potent for being somewhat indirect. In the hope of originality, any extravagance, anything irregular or spasmodic, was received with toleration, if not welcomed with applause. The impossibility of finding a royal road to learning had passed into a proverb, but there was a seductive fantasy of a republican road to literary eminence.

After all, however, the great cause of our critical deficiency was the want of men prepared for the office of critic by direct education and indirect influence of what the French call the *milieu*. This was the fountain and source of our weakness.

If we go back to first principles, there may well be some doubt whether the *nil admirari* or the *omne admirari* is the primal condition of the untutored mind. The traditional im-

---

\* Though we are dealing more particularly with literature, most of what we have to say applies equally well to art. The corner of a wood, the little reaches of a stream, a bit of dead wall, rendered with sentiment and true artistic feeling, may be worth more than the biggest panorama of the biggest mountain in the world, though reproduced with almost photographic precision. And here it is not amiss to observe, with reference to another branch of our subject, that the men who have written best about art have not generally been the greatest painters,—far from it. Neither are the greatest musicians the best musical critics.

† "The work of each immortal bard appears  
The single wonder of a thousand years."

mobility of the red man and of some Orientals may be the result of stoic self-control. If it is natural and unaffected, then not only must we hold the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child, but the Indian, as some have supposed that he should, must take intellectual rank below the negro. A question of more practical interest comes up when we inquire if the stage of childish admiration is necessarily succeeded by that of Aristarchian scrutiny and general fault-finding, and if this second stage is in its turn the prelude to a period of just and evenly balanced judgment. That a belligerent and savage critical disposition is the natural reaction from the *omne admirari* seems a fair conclusion from the testimony of literary annals; but we can be less sure that this state of things must necessarily be followed by a proper medium between the extremes. Perhaps the next reaction may carry us back nearly to the original position.

But whatever answer to these queries some Taine or Arnold might suggest, this one thing is certain, that the genuine critic must be the product of a high intellectual cultivation. Not of material civilization necessarily; he may be a boor to the fashionable exquisite: not of scientific progress; he may be an object of real or feigned contempt to the positivist: but he must be most liberally educated in all that concerns the humanities. He must be a scholar in the true sense of that often and much abused word. He must understand literary history. The man who is utterly unacquainted with Theocritus, even at second-hand through a translation (and there are many such among our would-be critics), cannot discuss Milton without making an absurd figure; neither can he who is ignorant of the commonest Greek idioms. And he who has not read Homer, and a trifle of Lucretius to boot, must utterly fail in appreciating the first and best of Tennyson's Arthurian fragments. The island Valley of Avilion has but a partial charm to the reader unacquainted with its double prototype, and the writer similarly deficient is wellnigh certain to stumble among its bowery hollows.

Some decades ago, before German had become a popular study, much doubtful Teutonic philosophy, and some rather better Teutonic poetry, was palmed off on our public as origi-



nal. Even at the present day ignorance of French, which by an amiable social fiction every person claiming to be educated is supposed to know, proves a constant source of blunders and impositions. But all this touches only the elementary and, as we may say, negative qualification. It is very important that the critic's eye should be a microscope of wit, but it must also have the comprehensive range of a very different instrument. Accurate and exacting when classical English is to be written, he must enjoy all the humor of a Biglow's or a Breitmann's dialect. While revelling in the boundless forest of Shakespeare, he must discern their own perfection in the trim *parterres* of Racine. He must be able to see the genius of Victor Hugo through all the clouds and rubbish of his manifold absurdities, and pick out the kernels of good wheat from the multitude of Swinburnian chaff. Plautus will not be too light for him, nor Seneca too heavy. The critic is often, perhaps in a majority of cases, called on to blame; but if he only understands the art of blame, he has taken a partial and one-sided view of his profession, just as the lawyer or novelist who has studied the worst aspects of human nature can only be said to have a partial knowledge of it, though he may be more advanced than the fashionable parson, before whom people are always on their good behavior.

Here it is eminently that a little learning proves dangerous. There is a condition of the critical mind which, perhaps, rather than the sanguinary and abusive, should be considered the second stage of progress, — though, indeed, the two are not unfrequently synchronous, — when the literary talent of a community has worn for itself a deep but narrow channel, and can see nothing beyond its own banks.

What we have said and hinted about the critic's qualifications shows us indirectly the antagonism, sometimes amounting to incompatibility, between the constituting elements of the critic and of the maker. The training of the former is such as to render him essentially eclectic; the latter has, in most cases, either by nature or formation, his own peculiar way of work. He is a leader or follower of some school, with which he is most conversant, and to which his preferences naturally gravitate. Deficiency of imagination and entire

absence of the creative power do not interfere with the excellences of the one; the genius of the other may be alloyed with prejudice and ignorance. If we admit Balzac's assertion, that the critic is impotent as an author, it will still be no less true that the author is apt to make wild work when he assumes the rôle of critic on his rivals.

It would be an old and a sad story to repeat our lack of the necessary appliances, direct and indirect, for providing critics of the true stuff. And the worst feature of the unpromising prospect was, not the existence of the deficiency (though that was bad enough), but the inability to see, perhaps it would be more fully correct to say, the disposition to deny that there was a deficiency. Our shortcomings, if frankly acknowledged, we might hope to supply in course of time by probable progress of cultivation; but when influential men set themselves steadily against the higher cultivation as a supposed obstacle to material progress, what is to be said or done? To take but one out of countless melancholy instances, it is on record that the proprietor of one of the most widely circulating newspapers in the country, when expressing his opinion about the different varieties of young men whom he had occasion to employ, spoke of "college graduates" in terms of contempt worthy of Shakespeare's Jack Cade. Fortunately men are often obliged to be better than their principles or apologies for principles; this very person has been compelled to make frequent use of the despised graduates, but the *animus* remains the same, and its results may be seen when any branch of learning somewhat recondite and out of the way has to be reported to the public. If, for instance, the members of the *Philological Association* were men to be much affected by newspaper notice, the extraordinary relations of their sayings and doings last summer by such members of the press as condescended to mention them at all, must have made them ready to tear their hair, break their spectacles, burn their Corssens and Ritschls, and subside doggedly into the old commonplace pedagogue routine.

Whenever pleasant incidents of this sort are mentioned with disapprobation, a number of worthy but mistaken patriots, who do not like to admit the inferiority of our country in any possible respect, usually have their answer ready. Sometimes it

takes the vulgar form of the *tu quoque*, and consists in pointing out some foreign instance of misappreciation or neglect; but more generally it appeals to individual cases of home work which, in their opinion at least, challenge comparison with the best produced abroad. And it is difficult to make these good people understand that their argument is mostly irrelevant, and that the question is one to be decided, not by particular examples here and there, but rather by what lawyers call the general issue. The *milieu*, to borrow again a pet term of our French friends, is different; the whole tone of respectable and what is supposed to be educated feeling on the subject is different. The European author, who addresses himself to any branch of literature worth the name, is certain to be noticed, and well noticed. If he be a pretender, his shortcomings and impositions are pretty sure to be exposed; if he have merit, some one will find it out, and explain it and encourage it. In no case will he be utterly neglected or dismissed with a few unmeaning words, because there is not a public to take interest in him, or a class of professional writers to understand him. Thus, to continue our illustration from philology and classics, it is little to the purpose that Professor West may be as good a scholar as Professor East. The latter has half a dozen well-known channels of communication with a comparatively large and general public whenever he pleases; the former will frequently be obliged to take refuge in some religious or semi-religious periodical of limited circulation, which admits the philology only as a species of padding to the theology. As for plain Mr. West, who has no college at his back, and no more imposing handle than A. B. or A. M. to his name, his lucubrations will sometimes fail to find even that honorable interment. What has been said of one branch is true of all, *mutatis mutandis*. The current standard is nowhere decided by isolated essays, however brilliant or acute, but by the general supply and the general support. We have been told that the "Saturday Review" lives by advertising dressing-cases; but we may be sure that if there were not a writing public behind, and a reading public before the "Saturday," all the dressing-cases in London would not save it. There was no lack of swells or dressing-cases in New York, but they did not save the "Round Table." That paper

went out, according to its own ingenuous dying speech and confession, because it could not find men enough of the right sort either to write for it or to read it. There was only room for one such weekly in the country, against three in England, counting the "Athenæum" for nothing. If high-priced advertisements of fashionable wares were the desideratum in such cases, why might not the reading matter begin just as well at the other end of the intellectual scale, say with something like "Our Society"? What would the Englishman need beyond his "Morning Post"?

Such, in our view, are the principal causes which have impeded the formation of an adequate standard of American literary criticism. The important question now presents itself, how far have they or any of them been removed, or come into process of removal.

Our national good-nature certainly continues to put forth its worst as well as its best developments. In morals and politics its effects have been most deplorable. But in literature the best men are less affected by it than formerly; and the increase of really good as well as of second-rate matter has forced some sort of discrimination on the most indiscriminating. On the whole, we may consider this impediment diminished, though not entirely removed.

In reference to the second obstacle we can take a more sanguine tone. It has virtually disappeared. As our capitals became less provincial and more cosmopolite, as our different sections were brought into closer contact, local prejudices have vanished and our republic of letters has acquired something like what European politicians call a solidarity. It is no uncommon circumstance for a periodical published in one city to be largely supported by contributions from another. Although the broadest and most desirable schemes for literary union are still in an embryotic state, smaller associations in their particular spheres have done much to combine their specialties all over the country. Of course it is impossible to suppress all local jealousies and cliques till we have a literary millennium, but they no longer assume formidable or even serious proportions.

Perhaps the consideration of the third difficulty had better

be included in that of the fourth and principal. And here the prospect is from some points very encouraging. Our workshops of critical stuff, if the expression may be allowed, have been established on deeper and firmer foundations. The progress of our colleges and universities during the present generation is not merely creditable, it is surprising. We may say, without exaggeration, that the good average student of to-day knows more than was thought sufficient to make a good average professor thirty years ago ; knows more in the true sense of knowledge, though his apparent range may be less. This is owing not merely to the general progress of the learned world in such matters, but also to the fact that the age of entering and consequently of graduating at our colleges having advanced about two years, the period of liberal education is lengthened by that time. It is almost a truism to say that we must depend for our supply of critics chiefly on the men who have gone through the universities in the regular fashion. Those who have picked up some sort of liberal education otherwise — as, for instance, later in life, by travel and residence abroad — are insufficient in number and apt to be imperfectly grounded. Whatever, therefore, advances the classical standard of our colleges, acts directly to raise the standard of literary criticism, unwritten as well as written. In this connection we are reminded of some of the paradoxical old proverbs, such as the half being greater than the whole, and the propriety of making haste slowly. It is probable that English literature, and the immediate application of the fruits of college study to it, occupied a larger part of the student's nominal attention thirty years ago than now ; but the absence of a proper foundation and sufficient training generally deprived these premature attempts of vitality and permanence. The barbarous term *sophomoric* became a popular designation for the rhetoric of collegians ; and if their criticism acquired no similar stigma of epithet, it was because the popular mind really did not know enough about criticism to distinguish one kind of it from another.

Other and broader influences, such as easier and more frequent communication with Europe, have lent their assistance. The operation of these influences must not be mis-

understood or misinterpreted. It does not consist in any immediate imitation of foreign models or transplanting of foreign ideas. The man, for instance, who undertook to reproduce the processes of Taine in an Anglo-American form, would only succeed in giving us some of the Frenchman's mannerism and pet words (like that one which we have had occasion to quote); the volatile essence, the fine Gallic wit, would everywhere be wanting in the Saxon imitation. The most valuable lesson to be learned from acquaintance with the current work of French critics is the knowledge how extensive and serious a business criticism can be; and the most valuable to be derived from a corresponding English familiarity is the knowledge how very respectable a business it is. When a young man is once impressed with the fact that cabinet ministers and noblemen of the highest rank are not ashamed, indeed are rather proud of writing reviews on purely literary subjects and publishing volumes of critical essays under their own names, he will be less impressed by the other fact that this pork-merchant or that member of Congress at home thinks such work a waste of time.

The result of all which is that the critic occupies a recognized position and has something like a professional standing. Yet we must not be too hasty in accepting the favorable changes and neglecting the contrary symptoms. While learning and taste are strengthening their strongholds, ignorance and brutality are also sending out their champions. The self-made man is happily unable to do as much mischief in literature as in morals and politics, but he does enough. We cannot overlook, however we may wish to despise, a school of writers in comparison with whom Walt Whitman is a deep scholar and refined artist. Nay, learning of a certain kind, as well as ignorance, has enrolled itself among the foes of literary taste. But here perhaps we should rather say pretence of learning; for our own real *savans* have not generally thought it worth while to participate in the *querelle d'Allemand* which some English positivists have endeavored to fasten upon English literature.

Moreover, a new danger has recently shown itself. The increase of literary production has developed out of what many

persons would hail as a sign of progress, a tendency altogether damaging to critical investigation. The great demand on all sides is for *short* books, *short* articles, *short* sketches; no elaborate essays, no complete monographs, are wanted. Length, if admitted anywhere, must find refuge in those insatiable devourers of manuscript, the fine-print columns of the daily triple sheet. Condensed thought, brief expression, the laconian method everywhere, except on the platform, where man is still allowed to inflict himself on his fellow-mortals for two long hours at a time. The volume shrinks to an article, the article dwindles to an item, to conciliate the demands of the public and the needs of the publisher.

Now, however desirable or necessary the laconic method may be for many purposes, it is assuredly not adapted to the requirements of criticism. The true critical spirit detests broad assertion and sweeping generality and curt dogmatism. It loves to proceed by caveats and qualifications and nice distinctions carefully worked out. It must do so, for it is a complex art and has to deal with complexities. Any style of writing, therefore, which admits, even indirectly and remotely, the item and paragraph as its bases and models, is directly antagonistic to the critical spirit and hostile to critical progress. Once more we allow that for certain purposes *systematically* condensed thought may be of great value; in morals and politics, for instance, where it is often necessary to detect and sweep away a great deal of irrelevant rubbish, introduced by ignorance or sophistry. Yet even here we meet with so many complications and find so many errors which are owing to imperfect and partial views, that we must be careful about applying a naked principle too hastily and laying down the very clearest positions too broadly. And in æsthetic matters, hurry and abbreviation are fatal to proper treatment. Most of all are they so in literary criticism. A book which deserves to be called a book is not a whole in the same sense that a work of art — a picture or a statue — is a whole. The most exhaustive description of the largest and best filled canvas could not be made to occupy a volume; a book, nay, a single poem may contain whole galleries of pictures. Take, as a single illustration, Tennyson's "Palace of

Art," note the wonderful wealth of description in the single stanzas, the separate rooms of that lordly pleasure-house; mark the figures boldly drawn in single adjectives. Let us glance at another example of suggestive painting by the same poet. Hamerton tells us that when Tennyson mentions the long fields of barley and of rye that lie on either side the river round about Shalott, he imports to us no information as to the *color* of these fields. He does not *directly*, it is true; but, given the time of the year and the state of the atmosphere, both which we learn from the context, any artistic reader may form a tolerably clear conception of the hue wherewith they would be clothed. The criticism of which we are speaking is very different from that which has been, with some reason, objected to, as encouraging a spasmodic school of literature. It is not looking out for and calling attention to "powder words and thunder words." It is just the contrary, the investigation of deft touches, of little epithets and phrases that are at the same time recondite and natural; and this involves of course the exposure of the diction which is of an opposite character, fussy and false. Much popular literature contains imagery and action and sentiment as untrue to nature as are the landscape delineations of some of the old masters so boldly denounced by Ruskin, but in the one case as in the other a well-trained mind is necessary to detect the error.

And here the sham-American, the stage-patriotic idea comes in with mischievous effect. The people are too active, too busy, too much engrossed in commerce and speculation, to read elaborate and many-sided expositions. They must take their criticism (and indeed all their literature) in pills. Even grammatical accuracy is a superfluous refinement, so long as a writer can make himself tersely intelligible.

Were such opinions to gain universal currency, we should end by having a public led and fed by publishers' puffs, and completely at the mercy of any literary charlatan who could let off from time to time a volley of verbal pyrotechnics. There is a style of *soi-disant* criticism which bears about the same relation to the real article that the American mode of tanning leather does to the European. The process is very much shorter, but the product is inferior in the same proportion.



Still, on a survey of the whole ground, after taking account of all influences favorable and unfavorable, the present condition gives reasons for satisfaction, and the future prospect is not without hope. A positive progress has been made; there is more learning, better training, clearer understanding, and a more cosmopolitan spirit. It would be ridiculous to deny that there remains a great deal to be done before we can reach the level of England or France, but every year diminishes the distance. And we have at least this crumb of comfort to console us for the vices of our political system, that they cannot touch the *edita templa*, the safe seat of the gods, the quiet seats which are not shaken by the wind of faction nor drenched by the showers and snows of political calumny.

And among the causes which tend to inspire hope we shall take the liberty of mentioning one which, occurring under less favorable circumstances, might have had just the contrary effect,—the transfer of the literary sceptre from New York to Boston. The old New York school did its work well, and to pour mock libations of dirty water on its grave is very sorry business. It was not forcibly supplanted; it died a natural death, and this being the case, there were several reasons why Boston should, in no arrogant or monopolizing sense of the term, be the headquarters of American literature. Discriminating in a broad and general way between the two cities, we may say that for the formation of a permanent literary body having serious claims to be judges and arbiters as well as producers, coherence is required on the one hand and a cosmopolitan spirit on the other. The practical difficulty is, that the two qualities are apt to interfere with each other, the former degenerating into a narrow and provincial cliquism, the latter into a desultory want of system; and these were precisely the respective dangers that threatened the two cities. But it was and is easier to get the cosmopolitanism into Boston than to establish the concentration and unity of purpose in New York; and therefore, were there no other reason, the former would naturally be the more feasible locality. But there is another reason and a very good one. The preponderance of commercial interests in our largest metropolis had imparted to literature an unduly commercial tinge, and given

some currency to a popular estimate of it as foreign to the true appreciation as an ideal of upholstery and millinery would be foreign to the highest conception of art. Nothing can be more hostile to the critical and æsthetic spirit than any influence which tends to place the publisher, and not only the publisher proper, but the book-manufacturing variety of the species in the position of the author's maker and judge, the creator of the creator. If Boston can resist this influence more successfully than it has been resisted in some other places, and can also shake off the last lingering traces of her intellectual provincialism, there is nothing to prevent her from forming a true school of deep, wide, and conscientious investigation, and placing New England criticism where it has never yet been, on the level of New England production.

CHARLES ASTOR BRISTED.

---

### ART. III. — ORATORY AND JOURNALISM.

FROM the great epochs of English eloquence, we have entirely lost the oratory of Pym, Hampden, Wentworth, and Falkland; of Bolingbroke, Pulteney, Windham, and Walpole; nearly all the speeches of Sheridan, the greater part of Fox's, many of those of the earlier and greater day of Chatham, and have received Burke's only as set down by himself in forms often differing widely from those in which they fell upon the ears of his hearers. Where the speeches of these men have survived, accuracy in their substance only, not in their diction, is the utmost that can be claimed for them. Chatham's earlier speeches were perpetuated by Dr. Johnson, who had not even the advantage of hearing them himself, but composed them from notes taken by others, and who once broke in upon a company engaged in praises of the eloquence of Pitt with, "That speech *I* wrote in a garret in Exeter Street." The remains of American orators of the same age are equally unsatisfactory and much rarer. Patrick Henry's speeches perished with their delivery; that notable favorite of declaiming school-boys — "Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the